

Fingerprints, dirt devalue silver coins

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions about coins and paper money.

Q—In 1972 we bought 20 silver dollars marked “brilliant uncirculated.” Several still shine, but two coins developed blue and black streaks while another has several dark spots. What happened?

T. W., Elmhurst

A—Silver coins change color over a period of years because of a chemical process called oxidation. Some people will pay more for silver dollars with deep, natural tones while other collectors prefer to buy rarities with bright shines.

However, small black spots—which form after dirt or moisture comes in contact with the metal—usually lower a coin's price on the hobby market. Be sure to store your dollars in airtight containers made of inert materials. And don't finger or breathe on the coins as you put them in the holders.

Q—Why are silver dollars from the 1920s called “Peace dollars”?

S. C., Chicago

A—They were made to celebrate the end of World War I; the so-called Peace design lasted from 1921 to 1935.